

## Claims

1       1. A method of updating computer software on a computer comprising:  
2            downloading software update information through a network to the computer;  
3            determining if a software update is available from the software update information;  
4            downloading a criticality check program through the network to the computer;  
5            executing the criticality check program on the computer;  
6            evaluating the criticality of the software update from an output of the criticality  
7            check program and the software update information;  
8            accessing stored user preference information; and  
9            determining if the software update should be automatically downloaded and  
10            installed from the user preference information and the evaluated criticality of  
11            the software update.

1       2. The method of claim 1 wherein the software update information includes a  
2            criticality rating.

1       3. The method of claim 2 wherein the step of executing the criticality check  
2            program on the computer includes determining the configuration of the computer and  
3            the step of evaluating the criticality of the software update includes adjusting the  
4            criticality rating from the software update information dependent upon the  
5            configuration of the computer to produce the evaluated criticality of the software  
6            update.

1       4. The method of claim 3 wherein the user preference information includes a user  
2            criticality threshold and the step of determining if the software update should be  
3            automatically downloaded and installed includes comparing the user criticality  
4            threshold and the evaluated criticality of the software update.

1       5.     The method of claim 1 wherein the software update information includes a  
2     location for downloading the criticality check program.

1       6.     The method of claim 5 wherein the step of downloading the criticality check  
2     program includes downloading the criticality check program from the criticality check  
3     program location.

1       7.     The method of claim 1 wherein the software update information includes a  
2     location for downloading the software update.

1       8.     The method of claim 7 further including the steps of:  
2       downloading the software update from the software update location; and  
3       automatically installing the software update.

1       9.     The method of claim 8 further including the step of producing a notification  
2     that the software update has been installed.

1       10.    The method of claim 9 further including the steps of determining if a computer  
2     reboot is necessary and including a request in the notification that the computer be  
3     rebooted if a computer reboot is necessary.

1       11.    The method of claim 9 further including the step of notifying the user of the  
2     availability of additional software updates.

1       12.    The method of claim 1 further including the step of producing a notification if  
2     it is determined from the user preference information and the evaluated criticality of  
3     the software update that the software update should not be automatically downloaded  
4     and installed.

1       13. The method of claim 1 further including the step of determining from the  
2 software update information whether to skip the steps of downloading and executing  
3 the criticality check program and evaluating the criticality of the software update, and  
4 wherein the step of determining if the software update should be automatically  
5 downloaded and installed comprises comparing a user criticality threshold included in  
6 the user preference information with a criticality rating included in the software  
7 update information.

1       14. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of downloading software update  
2 information comprises periodically automatically downloading software update  
3 information through the network to the computer.

1       15. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of downloading software update  
2 information includes sending a software update query through the network requesting  
3 the software update information.

1       16. The method of claim 15 wherein the software update query includes software  
2 identification information identifying software to be updated and the software update  
3 information relates to the software to be updated identified in the software  
4 identification information.

1       17. The method of claim 15 wherein the software update query includes software  
2 publisher information identifying a publisher of software to be updated and the  
3 software update information includes a list of software updates available for software  
4 published by the publisher identified in the software identification information.

1       18. The method of claim 17 wherein the step of determining if a software update is  
2 available from the software update information comprises determining from the list of  
3 software updates if a software update is available for software on the computer.

1       19. The method of claim 17 wherein the software update query includes software  
2       publisher information identifying a plurality of publishers of software to be updated  
3       and the software update information includes a list of software updates available for  
4       software published by the publishers identified in the software identification  
5       information.

1       20. A method of updating computer software on a computer comprising:  
2            downloading software update information through a network to the computer, the  
3            software update information including a criticality rating for a software update  
4            identified in the software update information;  
5            accessing stored user preference information, the user preference information  
6            including a criticality threshold set by a user of the computer;  
7            determining if the software update is a critical software update by comparing the  
8            criticality rating to the criticality threshold;  
9            automatically downloading the software update if the software update is a critical  
10           software update; and  
11           automatically installing the software update if the software update is a critical  
12           software update.

1       21. A method of updating computer software on a computer comprising:  
2            periodically automatically downloading software update information through a  
3            network to the computer, the software update information including:  
4            a location for downloading a software update,  
5            a criticality rating for the software update, and  
6            a location for downloading a criticality check program;  
7            automatically downloading the criticality check program through the network to  
8            the computer;  
9            executing the criticality check program on the computer;

10 evaluating the criticality of the software update from an output of the criticality  
11 check program and the criticality rating;  
12 accessing stored user preference information containing a user criticality threshold;  
13 and  
14 determining if the software update should be automatically downloaded and  
15 installed by comparing the user criticality threshold and the evaluated criticality  
16 of the software update.

1 22. A method of updating computer software on a computer comprising:  
2 downloading software update information through a network to the computer;  
3 determining if a software update is available from the software update information;  
4 if the software update is available, determining if a criticality check program is  
5 required for the software update;  
6 if the criticality check program is required for the software update, downloading  
7 the criticality check program through the network to the computer;  
8 if the criticality check program is required for the software update, executing the  
9 criticality check program on the computer and evaluating the criticality of the  
10 software update from an output of the criticality check program and the  
11 software update information;  
12 if the criticality check program is not required for the software update, evaluating  
13 the criticality of the software update from the software update information; and  
14 accessing stored user preference information and determining if the software  
15 update should be automatically downloaded and installed from the user  
16 preference information and the evaluated criticality of the software update.

1 23. A computer program product for updating computer software on a computer,  
2 said computer program product having:  
3 computer readable program code means for downloading software update  
4 information through a network to the computer;

5 computer readable program code means for determining if a software update is  
6 available from the software update information;  
7 computer readable program code means for downloading a criticality check  
8 program through the network to the computer;  
9 computer readable program code means for executing the criticality check program  
10 on the computer;  
11 computer readable program code means for evaluating the criticality of the  
12 software update from an output of the criticality check program and the  
13 software update information;  
14 computer readable program code means for accessing stored user preference  
15 information; and  
16 computer readable program code means for determining if the software update  
17 should be automatically downloaded and installed from the user preference  
18 information and the evaluated criticality of the software update.

1 24. A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a  
2 program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for  
3 updating computer software on a computer, said method steps comprising:  
4 downloading software update information through a network to the computer;  
5 determining if a software update is available from the software update information;  
6 downloading a criticality check program through the network to the computer;  
7 executing the criticality check program on the computer;  
8 evaluating the criticality of the software update from an output of the criticality  
9 check program and the software update information;  
10 accessing stored user preference information; and  
11 determining if the software update should be automatically downloaded and  
12 installed from the user preference information and the evaluated criticality of  
13 the software update.

1       25. A computer program product for updating computer software on a computer,  
2       said computer program product having:

3           computer readable program code means for downloading software update  
4           information through a network to the computer, the software update  
5           information including a criticality rating for a software update identified in the  
6           software update information;

7           computer readable program code means for accessing stored user preference  
8           information, the user preference information including a criticality threshold  
9           set by a user of the computer;

10          computer readable program code means for determining if the software update is a  
11           critical software update by comparing the criticality rating to the criticality  
12           threshold;

13          computer readable program code means for automatically downloading the  
14           software update if the software update is a critical software update; and

15          computer readable program code means for automatically installing the software  
16           update if the software update is a critical software update.

1       26. A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a  
2       program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for  
3       updating computer software on a computer, said method steps comprising:

4           downloading software update information through a network to the computer, the  
5           software update information including a criticality rating for a software update  
6           identified in the software update information;

7           accessing stored user preference information, the user preference information  
8           including a criticality threshold set by a user of the computer;

9           determining if the software update is a critical software update by comparing the  
10           criticality rating to the criticality threshold;

11           automatically downloading the software update if the software update is a critical  
12           software update; and

13 automatically installing the software update if the software update is a critical  
14 software update.